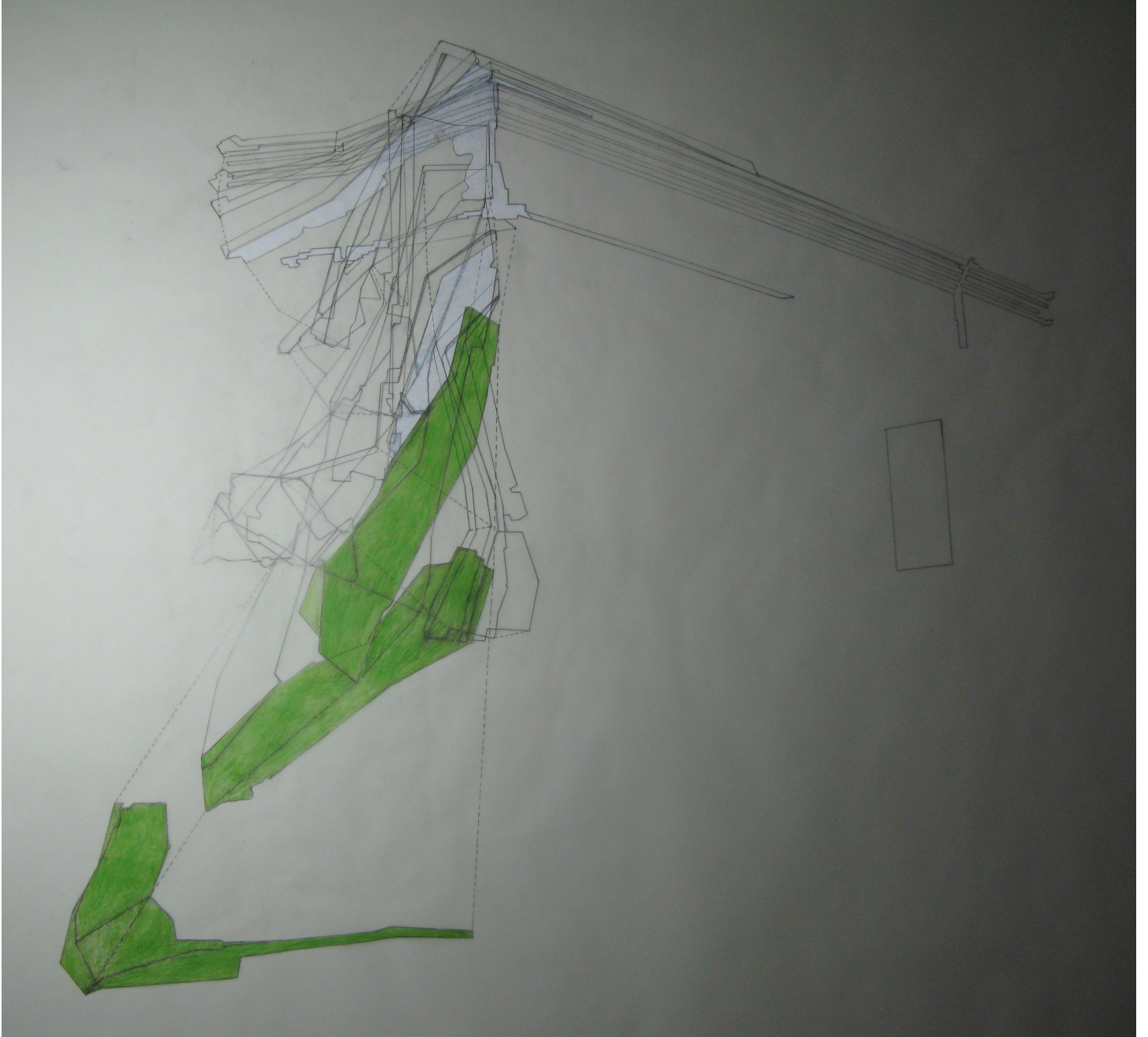


RESISTING THE REPRESENTATIONAL  
Riet EECKHOUT



Why is it difficult to speak about architecture?

-It seems like it is not. Many people talk excellently about architecture without any difficulty or hesitancy. The problem, in my view, lays not in talking about the subject; it is talking the subject that comes with a certain difficulty.

I am interested thinking about the subject for two reasons,

- (1) Because I am interested in modes of representation in the field of architecture (language being one of them), more particular how spatial thinking performs in different modes and degrees of representation.
- (2) Because I do have difficulties talking architecture.

### Embodied knowledge

Talking the subject of architecture, space or place making itself seems to be very difficult when we are trying to get an understanding of the process of it coming into existence in some way or form. If we are interested in speaking about Architecture, we are interested in knowledge transfer of that Architecture. So what knowledge are we interested in? We can talk about the architectural narrative, context or concept or we can describe end results of architectural endeavours in some way or form, which I'd like to refer to as propositional knowledge.

But there is an important aspect of architecture which is more difficult to talk about.

How do we transfer the knowledge buried deep within the skills of the practitioner? How do we transfer or talk about the tacit knowledge embodied by the maker? The strict definition of tacit knowledge implies that tacit knowledge stands diametrically opposite to propositional knowledge. Tacit knowledge is a type of knowledge that is not captured by language; we can only see it by its action. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that the practitioner knows he has but he cannot describe in terms other than his own performance. Tacit knowledge is the embodied knowledge of the practitioner and thus subjective and personal.

Language is a means of getting information from one mind to the other. Whilst different forms of language have particular possibilities for modifying the meaning they carry, tacit knowledge is defined in opposition to these forms by not being symbolically encoded, as it resides within the practitioner. So how do we tap into this important embodied knowledge of a practitioner? Tacit knowledge can only be transferred by close observation of the actions and thought process of the practitioner. Talking about architecture is a form of representation of the architecture. Words symbolise or represent the action or aspects of the observed.

It all feels very indirect and leaves too much space for interpretation. We lose the specificity of spatial intentions by just talking about them. How can we come close to and understand the act of making space through a mode so indirectly linked with the action?

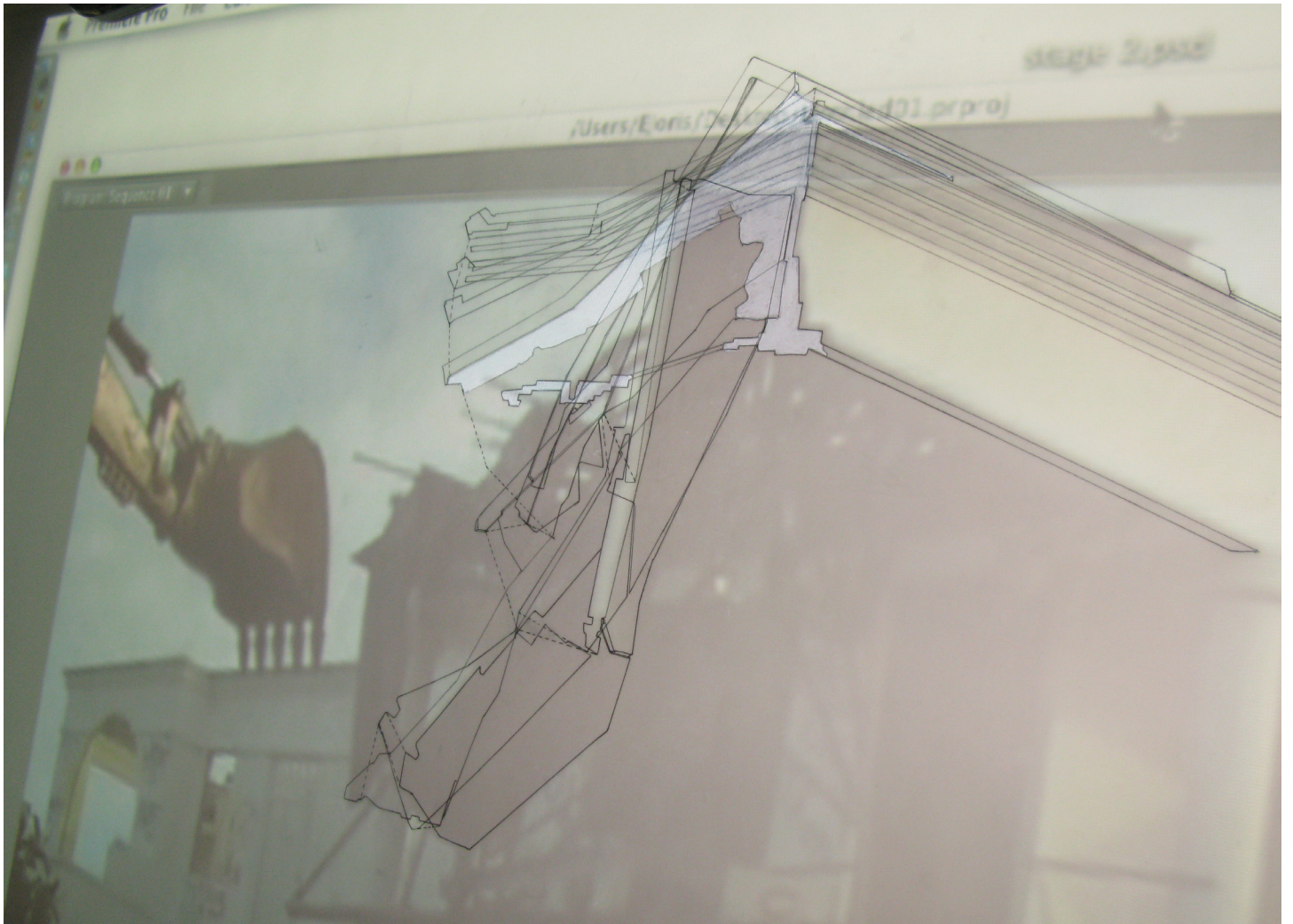
When a scientist does a scientific experiment, the end result and its narration can be directly related to the actions subsequently done and it can be narrated or explained rationally and logically. This is because of the rational and logical nature of the procedure. One and the same experiment can be executed by a variety of scientists to obtain identical results. In Architecture, this is very different. Every hand that draws, does it recognisably different.

I would like to state that it is thinkable that what makes or produces Architecture exists beyond pre-defined verbal structures and prior to a system of language.

This indeed makes it difficult to talk Architecture.

Left page *Figure 1 : 'Drawing Out Collapse'; 1550 x 840mm, pencil on tracing paper*  
*drawing based on video fragment of Jon Tarry*





The complexity of the specific

We speak a language based on the structure of categories, which by definition, reduces the complexity of the specific. We can talk about history in Architecture and its social impact; we can talk about narratives in architecture, symbolism, structure, materiality, composition or the nature of the observed quality.

Architecture can be described by observing qualities in end results (being built or unbuilt work) as it is usually done in architecture reviews. But by observing or describing the end result, very little seems to reveal itself about the process of thinking and making. How do we get to know anything about how this architecture in the form of representation it is made in? It seems however possible to understand that there is quality by experiencing architecture, without understanding or knowing the modus operandi of the implicit process.

As it is important to understand the quality of a scientific result through the manner in which it is conducted, how is it possible to know how architecture is conducted? How did the spatial and conceptual quality appear? How were decisions really made? How do we talk about the process of making architecture? By that I don't mean the construction or representation of architecture in its built or unbuilt form, I mean the process of quality production.

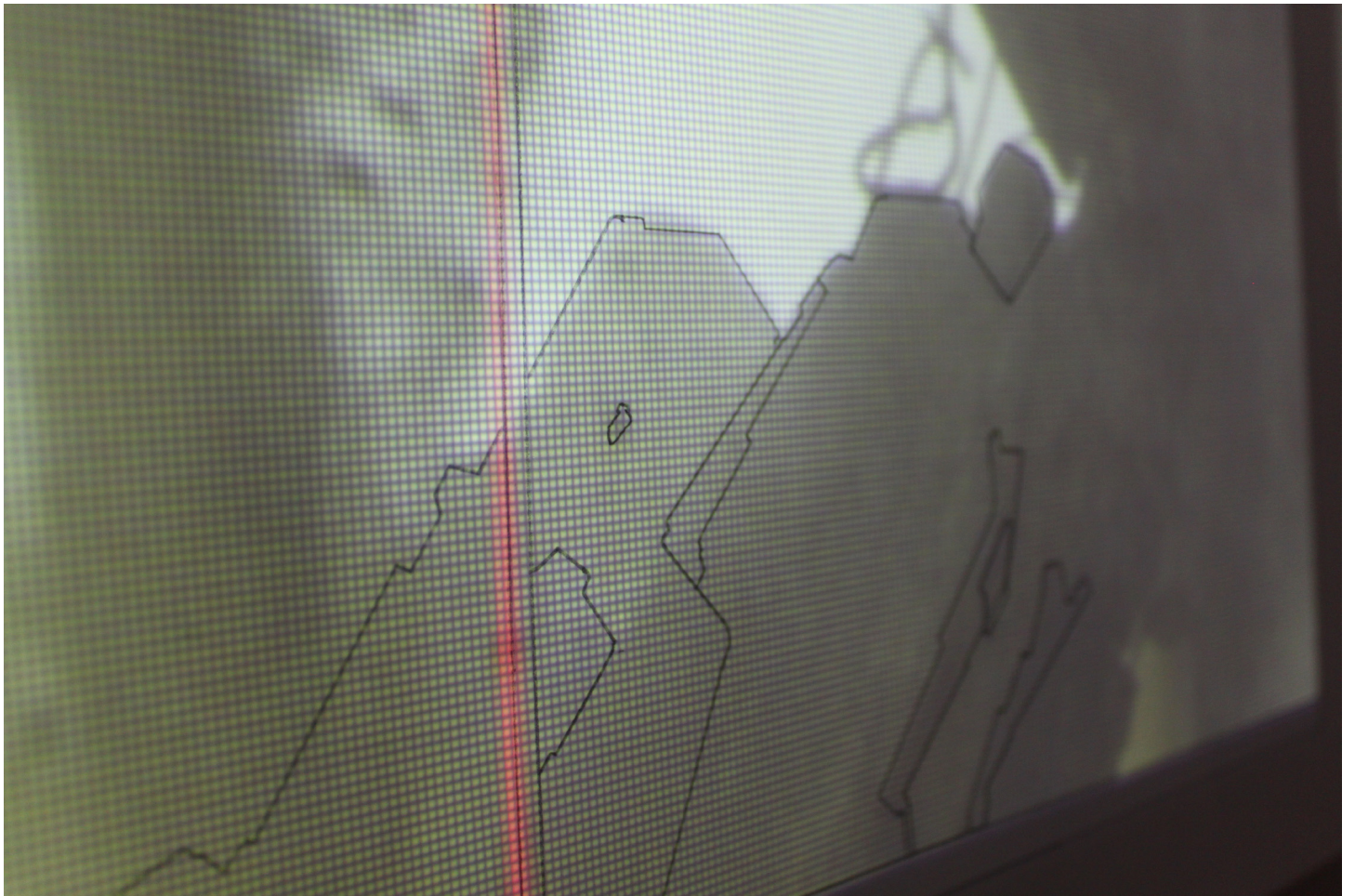
These all seem very personal questions to be asked to the practitioner or to be observed by seeing the action in the process of making architecture. The generation of architecture is a very subjective and personal endeavour, and therefore one will shortfall if only talked about objectively or propositionally. Architecture can be talked about in a propositional manner, narrating its serving and solution to the given context. But propositional knowledge can only be transferred when language can be used to transfer concepts from one person to another. Concepts, solutions, and even space experience can find its place in propositional knowledge transfer.

But how do we transfer the fundamental knowledge that is embedded in and embodied by the practitioner? How do we understand the Tacit Knowledge and its entanglement to the propositional knowledge of the practitioner?

I would like to take the liberty to speak about an aspect of my personal journey in attempting to understand a practice of architecture in order to possibly shed some light on ways to understand embodied knowledge and its complex relationship with language. I speak here from the point of view of the practitioner, not the academic. I am not a theorist; I cannot speak in general truths or elaborate within the perimeter of philosophy. What I can do is elaborate on the complexity of the specific in aspects of my own work. I talk to you as a designing practitioner.

I took a personal interest in the subject when I started research in Architecture at RMIT, Melbourne in 2004, by invitation under Dr Leon van Schaik, on my practice. This research aimed at understanding design methods and modes of practice in order to augment or develop found capacities.





Processing form; between the representational and non-representational

I am an architect. Part of my work is practiced through hand drawing. I investigate through drawing, I think about and try to further other aspects of my architecture practice through drawing. Drawing is used as a tool for thinking. The spoken or written language is an important aspect of the work, enabling one to converse about work and exchange thoughts, feedback and criticism; something that alternates with the drawing in the process of thinking about space.

I speak about what I know; I draw what I can't speak about just yet.

When I draw what I know or what I am familiar with, the nature of the drawing seems to change and comes closer to what I would like to call representational. The representational drawing helps to clarify and communicate to third parties. Such a drawing is a description of something one knows, expressed in lines, surfaces and volumes. (for example construction drawings)

On the other end of this spectrum I seek to investigate that what I have been calling the non-representational drawing. This type of drawing allows me to approach that what I do not know; that what still exists outside my vocabulary or category or any other pre-defined structure I am aware of. These drawings allow a practitioner to follow a hunch, intuitive sling shot manoeuvres in the dark, spatial accidents which may eventually lead to propositional knowledge.

These drawings are finger exercises, as scales are to a pianist, where technique, medium, and the manner in which we think and draw can be refined and redefined in order to better understand the complexity of specific intent. As I work through this mode of the non-representational drawing, there is an understanding through drawing I seem to be unable to talk about. For a brief moment, the ideal exists only in the drawing.

There is a fundamental understanding that cannot be talked about; something that is only to be understood through the action of drawing or perhaps the (re)experience of the drawing. But there is a strong belief that within that unspoken understanding, lays the core of what generates the quality produced. The only thing left to do when talking about this aspect of the practice is beating around the bush or circling around the subject/object in an attempt to indeed come closer to it.

First of all, I would like to discuss design strategy as a technique; -Collection of information and procuring context.

Most good things start with concise observation. Concise observation starts with uncritical surrender to the situation.

The drawing is led by a detailed tracing or copying of the contextual situation in order to absorb all information. By situation I mean all parameters deemed relevant for the project. All the tangible information that a site has to offer. A site in this context can be a physical site in the classical architectural sense, or a film fragment, a photograph, or perhaps a piece of text. When all information is traced and annotated (the annotation being the meaning of something that cannot be understood through observing the line only), one can consider the produced drawing as a site.

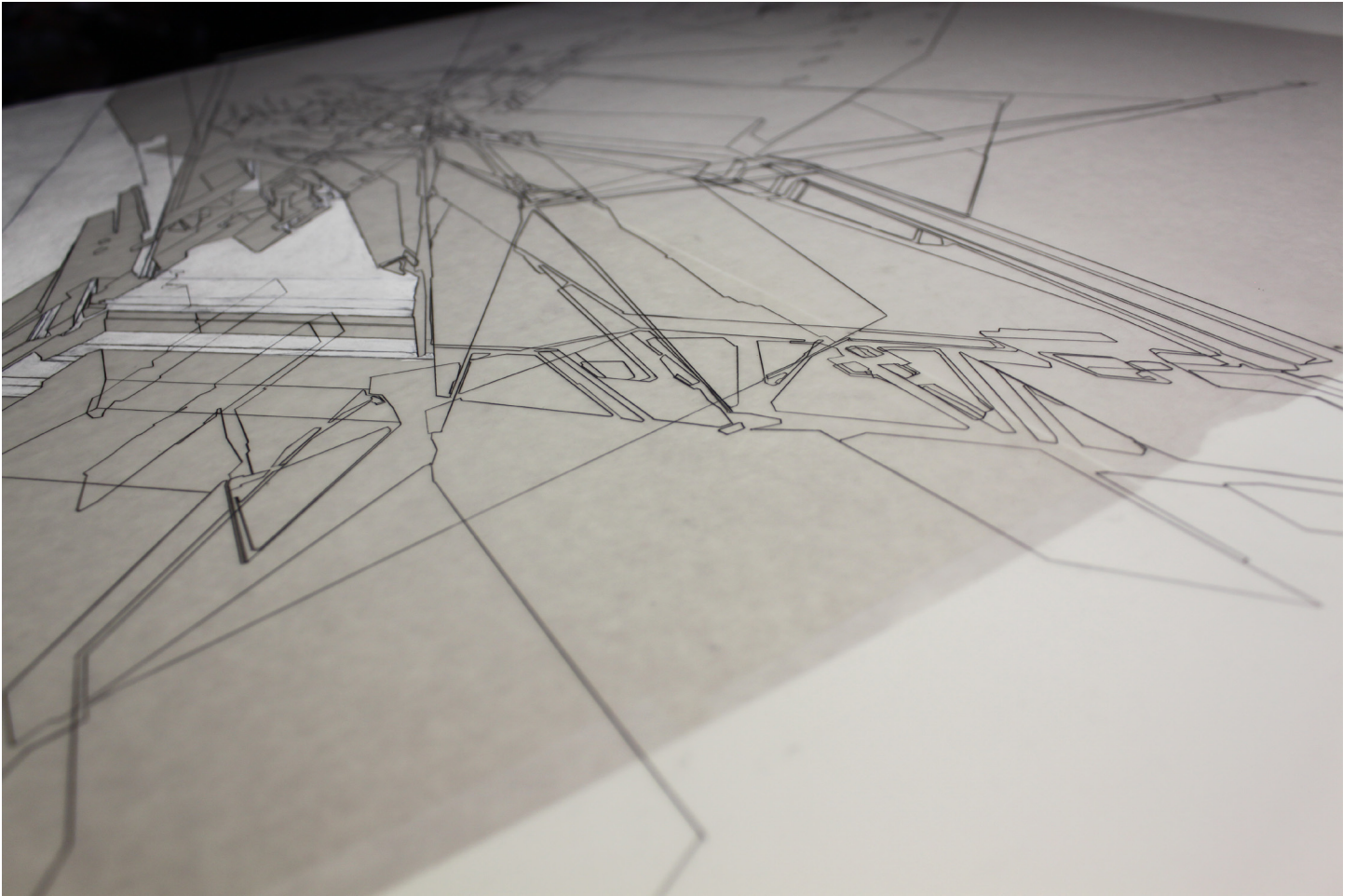
This site should be allowed to be looked at in detail from different point of views. These different points of view are then redrawn and manifest themselves as 'representations' lingering in the poesis of each project.

In this drawing process from one drawing to another, there is a pivotal moment or a threshold occasion (very much as in Heidegger's reference to poesis as a 'bringing-forth') when something that represents something moves away from its standing as one thing to become something else. That moment is what I like to call 'the non-representational moment'; the moment of becoming. The moment that is so difficult to talk about, but essential to poesis of the project.

With this practice I aim towards a resistance of 'representations' engaging with a design discourse of degrees of 'non-representation'. This sets up a practice of paradox; negotiating architecture as representational in the narrative of place yet resisting representation (avoiding a subordination to the preconceived image) by drawing presence through levels of absence; the creation of a 'representation' through modes of 'non-representation'.

I call this technique Process Drawing, as a verb, an action.

Left page *Figure 3 : detail of 'The Gate Drawings'; Pencil on paper; 600 x 840mm*





Process drawing exists as a 'circulatory system' of film, photography and drawing with the aim to investigate a practice platform negotiating these different media through some central methodical concern; drawing architecture freed from its representational role in order to find potent platforms to serve the representational; to serve and extend one's knowledge of the discipline.

To further clarify, I'd like to take you through some footnotes in my research. I speak about footnotes as they are annotations that can only be understood through the drawings.

(1) uncritical surrender; understanding context.

Collecting information and the importance of uncritical surrender.

'Drawing Out Collapse' is an investigation into the process of demolition. I am in general interested in demolition processes as a phase in the process of becoming. Something needs to go in order for something else to be constructed.

(figure 1) This set of drawings investigates the form finding aspect of a building element changing form as it is removed from its function. In that instance, the building element is freed from any cultural or symbolic meaning and goes into free fall.

To be able to come closer and better understand the subject of demolition, I started filming and photographing demolitions or use demolition footage.

(figure 2) I project the footage onto a drawing board enabling myself to engage with a changing set of parameters on a fixed malleable interface.

(figure 3) Sitting in the projected images or frames allows for the one that draws, to be submerged in the given data. It diminishes the distance between you and the information projected. It isolates the one that draws with the projected data. Size is important in this instance. It facilitates the uncritical surrender to the situation, it takes down preconceived guards or shields one holds. It allows you to resist the representation presented by the footage.

I'd like to speak to you about the drawing process of becoming in this -literally destructive, but also reductive act in a propositional sense. It is only by uncritical surrender to the action of tracing movement, that one can look through the debris, and as the dust settles the heuristic picking of elements can take place.



The importance of the drawings is the process or action of surrender; placing oneself in a position to enable seeing x through that we call y.

The set up itself with the projector and large drawing board and the medium of hand drawing is a tool to engage with the non-representational, -that what tries to come close to something that does not represent anything but is.

The filmic material projected onto a drawing board allows for a given situation to be represented very much in detail. Looking at an object or situation through 24 frames per second surrenders a lot of information that offers itself to be absorbed to understand the situation. The interest in film lays in the multitude of information the medium has to offer and the repetition of information within slightly ever changing contexts.

(figure 3) Projecting onto a drawing board at large scale and sitting at the pixel end of the image, allows one to reside in a position so close to the representation that one can only see parts of the totality.

In this instance, one is not able to reflect and take critical decisions (informed decisions), one is able to surrender uncritically to what is visible in close up, and cannot relate the pixel to the exact representational categories they belong. One starts to engage with different thinking processes, a thinking process resisting the representational.

We tend to reduce or categorise our thoughts very quickly, we seem to decide immediately on what is foreground and background, what is figure and what ground is, what is important and what is peripheral.

The question I ask myself is how architectural representation might help to avoid the reduction of thought too quickly in a design project. It seems like a handicap to be forced willingly into this categorical restraint.

How can we set up self-inflicted lateral routes in an attempt to resist categorisation in order to take the mind further away from the familiar? With the aim to investigate the unfamiliar and bring this in relation with what we know.

## (2) The in-between and the relational environment: Drawing Out Circumstances

Resisting categorisation and the very framework of language

I am interested in the in-between, again to resist categorisation and the preconceived.

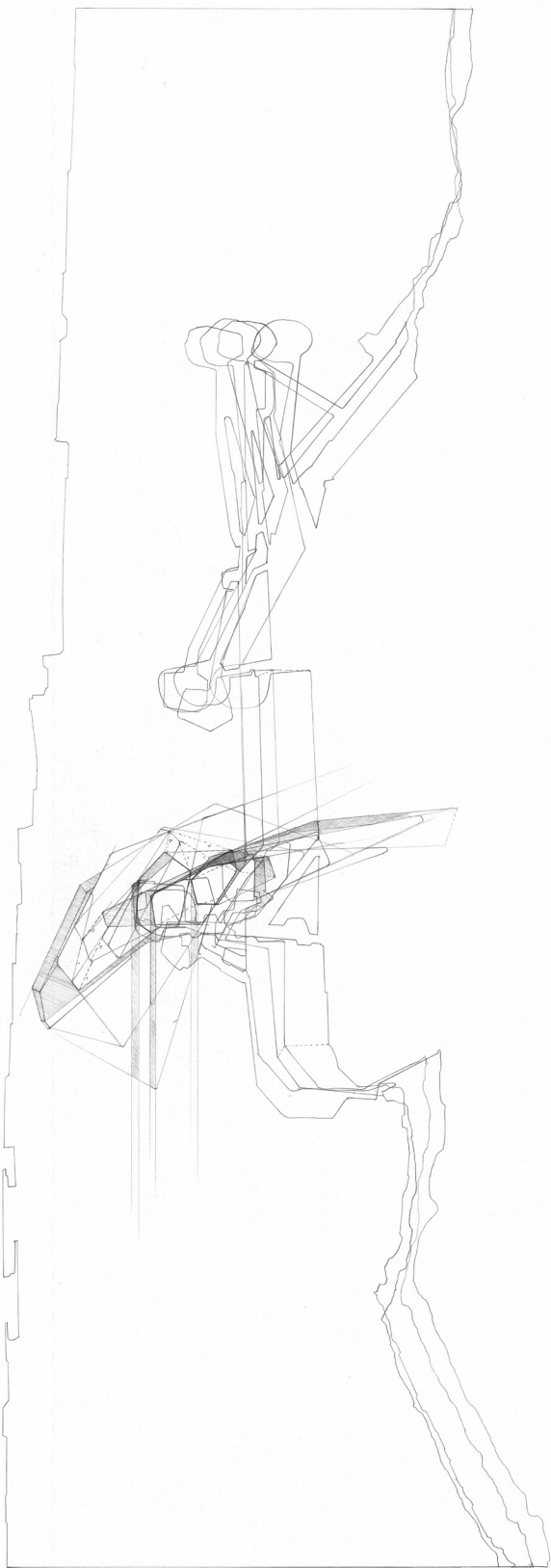
(figure 5) The drawing explores graphically the relational environment that exists between categories in the given context in order to find new form relationships essential to the situation. The drawing defines space through the notion of boundaries, space as geometry, space as measurement, as depth, as a field accommodating tension and force.

How do we think about the manifestation of a kitchen without thinking the category kitchen?

Language is quite powerful when it comes to pre-emptying what it is that we are talking about. When we speak about kitchen, we see a kitchen.

One way of thinking about it, is attempting to think about the relationship between categories to avoid being drawn to typologies as we know them. How can these categories become blind spots in our vision in order to be drawn to what essentially surrounds those known typologies.





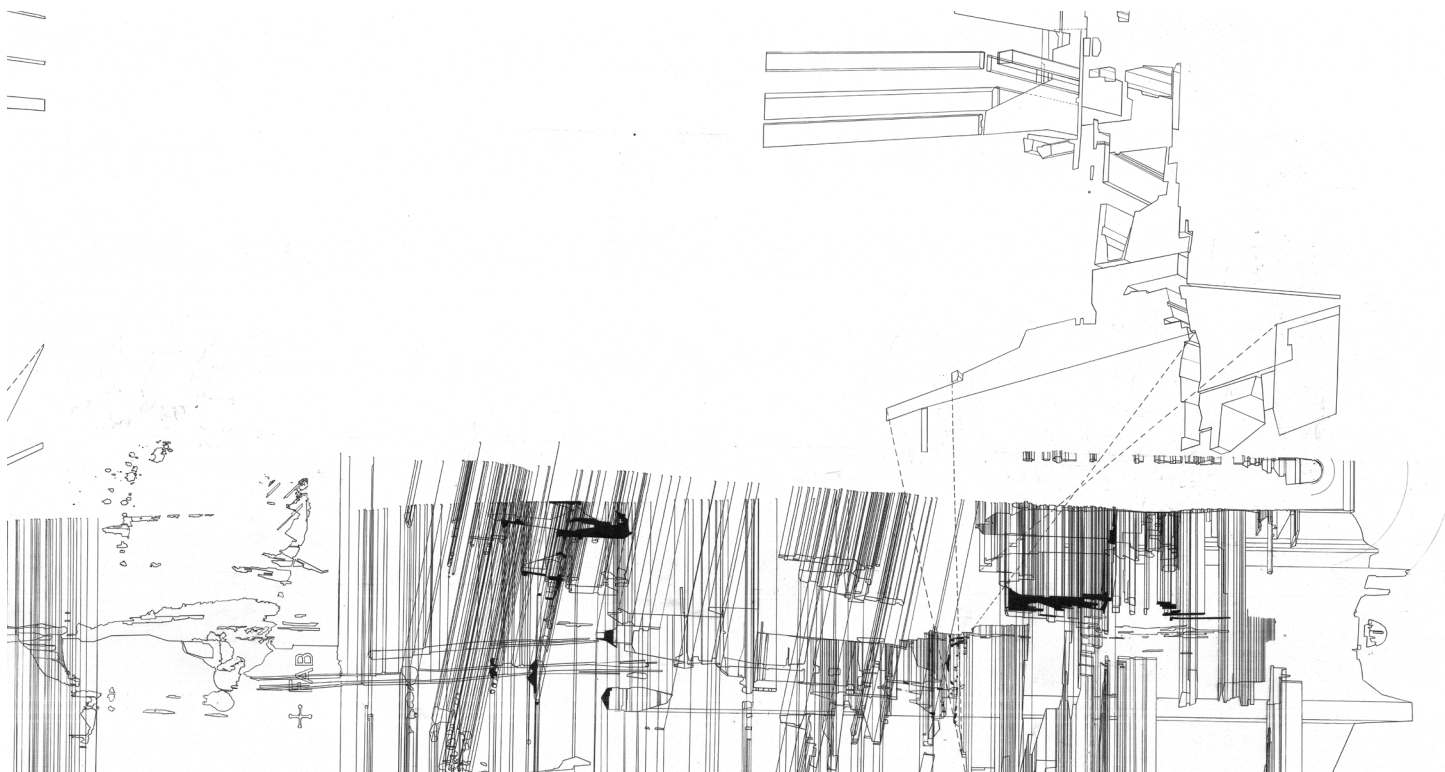
The figure Ground relationship; the common configuration in architecture whereby the building is placed on the given landscape or site.

The Figure, being the object that stands at the centre of the attention and the ground being the supporting background; this classical architectural categorisation avoids the potential complexity both can engage with. Through drawing 'Uncommon Ground', aspects of Figure-Ground collisions are explored.

Quite literally here in this set of drawings (figure 6) the footage of a moving object (crashing helicopter) is projected onto the drawing board to draw and understand how the ground receives the tension and force of the figure. The figure disintegrates to serve the form finding process of the ground resulting in a Figure-Ground reversal.

What is left is Ground that speaks of the Figure's passing.

The exact same reason why one might avoid using language as it leaves too much space for interpretation and one loses the complexity of the specific, in collaborative situations, language, written and spoken becomes an interesting tool to exchange and interpret work, setting the mind off on lateral routes of mis-interpretation, projection and accidental idea exchange. The delicate in-between, by closely observing tacit evidence embedded in the vocabulary of speaker and observer, observer and speaker, deviates points of view.





### (3) Slowness, Repetition and Iteration

Hand drawing is a technique that slows the hand and the mind, allowing time to be consumed by the drawing. The line follows the hand and the hand follows the line. Every line that is drawn deviates the drawing and the mind in an intricate manner. The process of the hand drawing, investigating a concept, closely links the formal with the conceptual.

Drawing 'Lines of Resistance' (figure 7) refers to physical and conceptual resistance, and the slowness in method and process.

The process of hand drawing, tracing and scaling, is a slow and manual process with very basic tools. The action as well as the conceptualization process gains a slow but pertinent character.

The slow and manual process of alternating between 'taking a distance' (conceptualizing, the formation of propositional knowledge) and 'stepping into the drawing' (the non-representational tool and method) allows for deviation and the possibility to correct itself over time resulting in a relevant thinking process.

In the drawing series, portions of drawings are enlarged, rotated and projected to be redrawn in an attempt to observe the embedded resolution (figure 4).

The information embedded within the thickness or depth of the line is redrawn from different point of views. Photographing drawings and redrawing them time after time from different perspectives in an attempt to see the subject from a different point of views stems from the urge to spend time with, understand the subject and discover its spatial implications.

The slow and manual production of iterations resist the singularity of point of view in the thinking process and attempts to include the complexity embedded within the specific.